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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Vladimir Putin of the
Russian Federation (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Putin

Notetakers: Jenna Galyean, Laura Hart,
Craig Wieschhorster and Jeff Blair

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko

DATE, TIME December 1, 2003, 9:02 - 9:32 a.m., EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Vladimir, good day. How are you, sir? (U)

President Putin: Hi, George. I like to hear your voice. Thank
you for this opportunity to talk to you. I don't think there
are urgent things to discuss, but nevertheless, I would like to
discuss some questions with you. (U)

The President: Good. (U)

President Putin: First, I would like to say that the mechanism
we established between Rice and the head of my administration is
still working, and this afternoon, I talked to some of the
participants of this mechanism who just arrived from Washington.
I think this is a good mechanism that allows us to cooperate on
the working level, and I think that the discussions we had in
Washington were quite useful. Now, going to sensitive issues
about Iraq; first of all, I would like to express my condolences
over the losses you have there presently. I closely followed
your visit to London and well understand that terrorists
committed the attack in Istanbul to disrupt your visit in
Britain. I think that Mr. Blair and you were courageous and
didn't allow those bastards to fulfill that goal. George, you

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(know that our vision on the Iraqi issue differs, but in a situation like this, you will have our full support, no doubt about it. I am not asking for your direct answer at the moment, but I would like to make one short observation, nevertheless. I heard of signals from the Russian ambassador in the United States concerning the situation in Iraq. So, we together might think of some cooperation in this view that Russia supports you and we are with you, but no one in your administration is able to tell us what you want from Russia. So, we are obviously limited in what we can do. (S)

The President: Yeah, sure. (S)

(President Putin: But, such aid from Russia is possible and we are ready to provide it, especially when it concerns the U.N. Resolution. Now, going back to the current situation, we are ready to engage in the economic field in Iraq. We do not need only major oil projects there. We don't want our companies to just get some profit there. We want to help the Iraqi economy grow back and are interested in developing small- and medium-sized enterprises, already with some success. We would like Mr. Bremer to more actively respond in this field because we see enormous potential there. We know that Bremer and the head of the Iraqi administration have a plan of political settlement in Iraq. I don't know whether they did it on purpose or not, but this document does not mention the U.N. at all. In my opinion, from a political point of view, this is a mistake. This document says that the election of a new Iraqi government will take place by the end of 2004. As I told you at Camp David, we cannot allow a vacuum of power in Iraq. A real period of calm is needed, but there is the danger that we increase the possibility for terrorist attacks from people who arrive in Iraq from all over the world. What drives them there is that they see the United States as an occupation force there. There is a need to Iraqize the process of transition of powers there, as it will help the situation immensely. Frankly speaking, I don't have a solution there in Iraq. We could think it over once again. (S)

(And now, just a couple of words on the situation in Georgia. As far as you know, George, we did our best not to allow blood to be shed. You know my attitude toward Shevardnadze. We spoke about him with you many times. The state of Georgia is a viable state that has existed already for ten years, but we cannot say that the transition of power under such a push from the opposition was truly democratic. If such a scenario would happen in other countries of the former USSR, for example what

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happened in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, that would not bring anything good. It is quite clear that Georgia needs international aid. We want the OSCE to step in immediately to help Georgia to prepare for the elections. I hope the new Georgian leadership will try to alleviate the tensions that exist now between Georgia and Russia. (S)

So, there is another hot spot in the former USSR and this is Moldova. Starting this summer, we made some active steps to alleviate the situation in that country. We went to the Moldovans and in the long run we will reach an agreement acceptable by the two parties. We also agreed to withdraw from the Russian military base, leaving only peacemaking troops, one thousand to a thousand and a half men, with light weapons only. We also agreed on sending an international peacekeeping force there. Unfortunately, this agreement failed. Javier Solana expressed his negative comments to the U.S. Ambassador in Moldova who then pressed the Moldovan leadership to dissuade this agreement. As a result, the agreement was not fulfilled. The former republics of the USSR have a unique opportunity and experience. Nevertheless, we hope to continue our consultations on this issue and we want it to settle down. We don't want to see trouble on our borders, as it is very close to our home. We don't want to see conflicts on our borders and want to see territorial integrity preserved. (S)

And now to our bilateral relationship. I think that the Camp David Checklist is moving forward quite nicely and I hope we shall continue our cooperation. Lastly, we also discussed the Iranian issue during our talks. Today, we have had close talks with our European colleagues. I just met with our Minister of Atomic Energy and he told me when he visited the United States he also actively participated in the discussion of this issue. I would like to thank you for such attention to the minister and this problem. I would like to remind you of my proposal. We need to develop a unified approach toward Iran that will unite the United States, Russia, and Europe. Only such an approach will make the Iranians fail to find a loophole in it. Next year, the G-8 summit will be held in the United States. During this Summit, we could discuss this unified approach that shall not allow Iran to develop any military nuclear program while leaving the nuclear market free for competition. That's all I wanted to tell you. (S)

The President: Thank you, Vladimir, for that comprehensive list. Thank you. On Iran, the message ought to be unified. They should not be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon. I think

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(it's a good idea to discuss it at the G-8. Secondly, in Georgia, thank you very much for your and Ivanov's work in ensuring there would be no bloodshed. We need to have non-corrupt free elections which would be helpful to you and the people of Georgia. That's a good idea on the OSCE. I'll talk to our people about that. Thank you for your offer to help in Iraq. Step one is to kill the bastards. Oh, I mean bring them to justice. That's what I mean. We are doing a pretty good job. (S)

President Putin: It's so good that you are going by yourself to Baghdad. (S)

The President: That sent a signal, which is the kind of thing you would do. (S)

President Putin: Especially for those military men who are risking their lives in Iraq. They now know that their Commander in Chief is truly with them. It shows strong character. (S)

The President: Thanks, Vladimir. It's the kind of thing you would do. (S)

(President Putin: Yes, I would probably act the same way. (S)

The President: Finally, in Iraq, the U.N. will be involved. The policy of my government is that we want them to be involved, but Kofi needs to assign a special emissary, a special representative. It's very important that we work on the checklist. Thanks for sending Chernov over here. Those are very important meetings. One thing that is a sensitive subject is the arrest of the businessman Khodorkovsky. That sent an interesting signal. People here in America know that we have good relations and that we are friends, so they ask me, "What is Vladimir up to?" I think it's very important that you send a signal that you respect the rule of law and the rules of the state. I very much would like to sit down and hear your strategy on this issue. It was a very interesting decision that you made. Now is not the time to discuss over the phone. We'll discuss it another time, but thank you for the call. It's been a good call and we should keep talking like this. I'm off to give a speech in Michigan today. It's always good to hear from you. You have interesting views of the world and you think things through in a clear way. (S)

(President Putin: Well, George, thank you for your comments. You shall not have any doubts that the rule of law will be

(respected in Russia. I spoke about this with Prime Minister Sharon when he visited Russia. He warned that I might have trouble with international Jewish organizations because Khodorkovsky is a Jew and they didn't like that he was arrested. But no one will be able to label me as an anti-Semite, as I grew up living next to neighbors that were Jews and we got along quite good. The President of Russia will respect the rule of law, and all else, regardless of their relations or background. I will respect the rule of law and they will do that. I also told Sharon, "You are a tough man mister Prime Minister. I may agree or disagree with your ways, but one thing is for sure, you will not allow anyone to blackmail you and I will not allow anyone to blackmail me either." So George, you shall not doubt that democracy and the rule of law will become stronger in Russia. But this also means that everyone shall observe the rule of law, and if he was a U.S. citizen, then he would have been in prison long ago. Once again, the rule of law and democracy will be protected in Russia. (S)

The President: Thanks again for the call. My best to Ludmilla and the girls. (U)

(President Putin: Thank you very much, George. My best wishes to your family as well, and have a good trip to Michigan. (U)

The President: Thank you very much, my friend. (U)

President Putin: Thank you, George. Good-bye. (U)

The President: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --